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An Assessment of Aggressive Behaviour between Prison Inmates and Non-Prison Inmates in Makurdi Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study assessed aggressive behaviour between prison inmates and non-prison inmates in Makurdi metropolis, Nigeria. An ex post facto research design was adopted and 122(50.2%) prison inmates and 121(49.8%) non-prison inmates participated in the study. The study comprised of 161 (66.3%) male and 88 (36.2%) female. Their age ranged between 18 and 35 and mean age of 21.3. Aggression questionnaire developed by Garcia-Leon, Villa, & Ramos (2002) which measures physical, verbal, suspicion and anger with resentment was used to collect data. Four hypotheses were generated and tested using independent t-test. The result showed a significant difference in physical aggression between prison inmates and non-prison inmates and a significant difference in verbal aggression between prison inmates and non-prison inmates. The result also indicated no significant difference between prison inmates and non-prison inmates on suspicion while there was a significant difference between males and females on overall aggressive behaviour. Based on the findings, it was recommended that factors that mediate and moderate aggressive behaviours should be further explored by researchers and anger management should as well be introduced in prison organizations and at community levels.

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1. Introduction

Aggressive behaviours displayed by prison inmates is a growing and common problem of concern to prison authorities and general populace within and around the perimeter walls of prison communities. These behaviours are

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characterized by wide range of abnormalities such as physical fighting, bullying using dangerous weapons, verbal threat to self and others and impulsive aggression (Fox & Zawit, 2001).

Whilst definitions differ widely, 'aggressive behaviour' or 'aggression' is defined as behaviour intended to harm another individual who is motivated to avoid that harm (Bushman & Anderson, 2007). Equally, aggression is behaviour that is unwanted and is perceived by the person that receives it as intrusive and harmful. This definition excludes accidental acts that lead to harm, such as losing control of a motor vehicle and killing a pedestrian, but includes behaviours intended to harm even if attempt fails such as when a person attempts to shoot but misses a human target.

Aggression among prison inmates is undoubtedly an important issue, and it is a behaviour that occurs among all types of prisoners-men, women, juvenile, young and adult offenders (Ireland, 1999). Studies have shown that prison inmates engage in wide range of aggressive behaviour such as violence towards others, suicide, suicidal attempt; deliberate self harm, substance use, unprotected sexual activity, slavery and destruction of public property that increase their probability of being involved in serious physical diseases or mental disorder such behavior result in frequent conflict with land, resulting in death, injuries to self or others (Suresh, Pratina, Rajani Kweur & Madhusudhan, 2011).

According to Chandrasheken et. al. (2007), they believed that aggression is present in each of us either prison inmates or non-prison inmates and these can be modified by experience in both positive and negative ways. They have defined aggressive behaviour as a behaviour aimed at causing harm or pain to others or self. Then aggression can be manifested towards self or others; can be direct or indirect; physical or emotional; active or passive and verbal or non-verbal.

Kjelsberg and Laake, (2010) have observed that aggressive behaviours exhibited by prison inmates are not only dangerous to self but it is detrimental to the individual and the general safety and moral of prison environment. In a related development, these behaviours have also been attributed to various factors such as suicide, self injury, substance use, Tuberculosis, HIV/AIDs and many other health related problems manifested by the prison inmates.

In Nigeria today, it has been observed that individuals exhibit various forms of aggressive behaviours at different places such as home, school, office, political meetings and even religious functions and at any time (Awopetu, Ihaji & Igbo, 2011) making the whole society look aggressive.

The social and political focus on aggression has increased dramatically in recent years. In the United Kingdom, society appears to be in a state of confusion and disbelief as the number of lives lost as a result of the series of aggressive attacks perpetrated by young people increases. In 2009, many were horrified as they learnt that young brothers, aged 10 and 11, had lured two boys, aged 9 and 11, to a South Yorkshire ravine before carrying out a brutal attack (British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 2009). In January 2008, there were two fatal stabbings and several other knife attacks on teenagers, committed by other teenagers, in England (BBC, 2009). Official statistics on the behavior of individuals only serve to increase this level of concern (Joseph Row Tree Foundation, 2008; Youth Justice Board, 2004). For example, in a survey of over 30,000 young people in England and Wales in 2005, 14% of the sample reported attacking someone with the intention of hurting them in the previous 12 months (Armstrong, Hine, Hacking, Armaos, Jones, Klessinger, & France, 2005). Further, according to the sentencing statistics, in 2007 45% of all crimes committed by young people were violent crimes against people.

Aggression in moderation appears to be a vital adaptive behaviour in humans. For example, it can be viewed as a positive response when one is threatened. Aggression is a prominent feature in childhood, often labelled as tantrums in some cases. Even very young children show features of aggressive behaviour; by eighteen months, children can be observed being physically aggressive toward siblings, peers and adults (Hay, Castle, & Davies, 2009; Keenan & Wakschlag, 2000). However, the vast majority of children will unlearn this behaviour based on the cues they receive from their environment. As they mature, they evolve better responses by observing and learning from others, their environment and their experiences. This fact is important because it places the nature and quality of interactions with others and the environment in which a child grows up in at the heart of aggressive behaviour.

The continuation of aggressive behaviour into adulthood is of particular concern as the prospects for these individuals are bleak. Not only does aggression have both physical and mental impact upon the victims and their families, it also has a negative impact on the aggressive individuals themselves including placing them at a higher risk of alcohol and drug abuse, involvement with the criminal justice system, depression and suicide attempts (Fergusson & Horwood, 2008; Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2000; Nagin & Tremblay, 1999). Further, aggressive behaviour

escalate in severity which increases risk of spousal abuse and neglectful and abusive parenting as well as decreasing employment prospects for individuals (Fergusson & Horwood, 2008; Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2000). Indeed, research has shown that aggressive children are at high risk of later serious and chronic violent behavior and suggests that there is stability in aggression from adolescence to middle age (Kokko & Pulkkinen, 2005). For example, correlation findings from research have shown that, in men, physical aggression at age 8 was moderately stable to physical aggression at age 30 (Huesmann, Eron, Lefkowitz, & Walder, 2004) and weakly stable from age 8 to severe physical aggression at age 48 (Dubow et al, 2006).

Although there appears to be stability in aggressive behaviour over the course of development, resistance from aggression also is common (Loeber & Stouthamer-Loeber, 2008). Many children who are aggressive at a young age modify their behaviour before, or soon after, they enter adolescence.

Although prisons are designed to correct inmates, it sometimes challenging, and sometimes educational, and most prisons are full of aggressive and violent inmates. Research has shown that as many as 89% of prisons are full of aggressive inmates (Douglas, Gentile, Lynch, Linder, & Walsh, 2004), and that about half of the prisoners' aggressive behaviours are towards each other (Douglas, et al, 2004). The severity of aggressive behaviour among inmates has spurred much research in this area. A meta-analysis by Anderson and Bushman (2007) found that across 54 independent tests of the relation between inmates and aggression, involving 4262 inmates, there appears to be five consistent results of inmates' aggressive behaviour.

The dimensions of the aggressive behaviours; physical, verbal, direct and indirect have been found to be indices that many inmates used as target against one another. In a study conducted by Ireland, Archer & Power (2007) exploring the physical aggressive behaviour among prison inmates with reference to behavioural characteristics, it was reported that physical aggression (bullying) was more common among the inmates. Official records of prisoners equally complimented this study as it was observed by Delisi, berg & Hoschstetler (2004) that many prison inmates had cases of physical aggression (Violence records).

Verbal aggressive behaviours seem to be very common among prison inmates and non-prison inmates. People raise all forms of abuse on one another at the slight of little provocation. Prison inmates engage in physical fighting with one another as this was observed by Kreu, Maj & Robert (2002) in their study of plasma testosterone levels of fight and verbal aggression in prison. Analysis of plasma testosterone showed a considerable stability of an individual's level over two weeks of study period, with highly significant differences observed between prisoners and non-prisoners. Meanwhile, plasma testosterone levels did not differ in fighting between fighting prisoners and non-fighting prisoners.

Staying in prison increases aggressive behaviours, increases aggressive cognitions, increases aggressive emotions, increases and physiological arousal. These effects are detrimental; they have been found in inmates, in males and females, and in experimental and non experimental studies. In the same vein, aggressive behaviours are now being witnessed in the society today among non-prison inmates most especially among the garage boys, motorcyclists, political thugs and students of higher institution of learning.

It against this background that the study aims at assessing the aggressive behaviour among prison inmates and non-prison inmates in Makurdi Metropolis vis a vis the following objectives are to:

1. Determine the out the differences in physical aggression between prison inmates and non-prison inmates.
2. Ascertain the differences in verbal aggression between prison inmates and non-prison inmates
3. Compare differences in indirect aggression between prison inmates and non-prison inmates.
4. Compare whether there is gender differences between prison inmates and non-prison inmates on aggression.

2. Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. Is there a significant difference in physical aggression between inmates and non inmates?
2. Is there a significant difference in verbal aggression between inmates and non inmates?
3. Is there a significant difference in indirect aggression between inmates and non inmates?
4. Is there is sex difference in aggressive behaviour?

3. Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following hypotheses:

1. There will be significant difference in physical aggression between inmates and non inmates.
2. There will be significant difference in verbal aggression between inmates and non inmates.
3. There will be significant difference in indirect aggression between inmates and non inmates.
4. There will be significant gender difference in between prison inmates and non-prison inmates on aggression.

4. Methodology

The following procedures were adopted for the study:

4.1. Design of the Study

The study employed ex-post facto cross sectional survey design to obtain information on respondents' aggressive behaviour.

4.2. Instruments

The Aggression Questionnaire (AQ) developed by Garcia Leon, Reyes, Vila, Perez, Robles and Ramos (2002) was used. The aggression questionnaire is a 29-item instrument designed to measure the different dimensions of the hostility/anger/aggression construct. It consists of 4 subscales that assess: (a) anger, (b) hostility, (c) verbal aggression, and (d) physical aggression. Internal consistency of the four factors shows the following values: Verbal Aggression, .57; Physical Aggression, .63; Anger with Resentment, .77; Suspicion, .67; and total score, .82. The scale is scored on a 5-point Likert scale of 1-Strongly Disagree; 2- Disagree; 3-Undecided; 4- I Agree; 5-Strongly Agree.

4.3. Participants

The participants were made up 243 who were purposively selected and administered questionnaires to. Out of which 122(50.2%) were prison inmates and 121(49.7%) non- prison inmates. While 19(7.3%) of the respondents did not indicate whether there were inmates or non-inmates. The respondents' characteristic based on self report includes age, sex, marital status, religion, tribe and educational qualification. The ages of the respondents ranged between 18-35 years. Respondent sex distribution indicated that 161(61.5%) were male, 88(33.6%) were female while 13(5.0%) did not indicate their sex. Marital status of sampled respondents indicate that single respondents were 229(87.4%), married respondents 19(7.3%) while 14(5.4%) of the participants did not indicate their marital status. In terms of religion 229(87.1%) were Christians, 32(12.2%) were Muslims while 1(4%) did not indicate his or her religious background. Respondent's tribe showed that Tiv were 95(36.3%), Idoma 80(30.5%), others were 78(29.8%) and 9(3.4%) did not indicate their ethnic group. Educational qualification of respondents showed that 1(4%) had PhD, 32(12.2%) were degree holders, 80(30.5%) had HND, 67(25.6%) had NCE/OND, 67(26.3%) had SSCE while 13(5.0%) of respondents did not indicate their educational qualification.

4.4. Procedure of Administration

Before administering the copies of the questionnaire, the researcher sought permission from the prison authority and consent was obtained from the inmates before administration was carried out. Only participants who were willing were allowed to participate in the test. Non inmates were purposively selected from the general public within Makurdi Metropolis. This was done mostly during office hours so as to meet respondents in their offices. Before administering the questionnaire to non-inmates participants, the researcher gave participants a statement of the

study's general purpose as well as information regarding anonymity, confidentiality, and their right to discontinue participation at any time. Questionnaires were administered to all categories of people who meet the criteria of the study.

5. Results

This study tested four hypotheses using independent t-test. The result is presented below.

Hypothesis 1: There will be significant difference in physical aggression between inmates and non inmates. The result is presented in table 1 below

Table 1: Independent t-test showing difference in Physical Aggression between Inmates and Non Inmates

Variable	Persons	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	p
Physical	Inmates	122	14.06	5.11	2.27	241	.024
Aggression	Non Inmates	121	12.59	4.98			

The result from Table 1 shows that inmates differ significantly from non inmates on physical aggression ($t(241df) = 2.27$; $P < .05$ two-tailed). Based on this finding, the research hypothesis was confirmed. The result further shows that inmates respondents had a mean and standard deviation scores of ($X=14.06$; $SD=5.11$) while non inmates had a mean and standard deviation scores of ($X=12.59$; $SD=4.98$).

Hypothesis 2: It stated that there will be significant difference in verbal aggression between inmates and non inmates.

Table 2: Independent t-test showing difference in Verbal Aggression between Inmates and Non Inmates

Variable	Persons	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	p
Verbal	Inmates	122	16.88	6.73	2.01	241	.045
Aggression	Non Inmates	121	15.32	5.20			

The result in Table 2 shows that there is significant difference on verbal aggression between inmates and non inmates ($t(241df) = 2.01$; $P < .05$ two-tailed). It was further observed that inmates scored ($M=16.88$, $SD=6.73$) on verbal aggression compared to non inmates ($M=15.32$, $SD=5.20$).

Hypothesis 3: There will be significant difference in indirect aggression between inmates and non inmates.

Table 3: Independent t-test showing difference in Indirect Aggression between Inmates and Non Inmates

Variable	Persons	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	p
Indirect	Inmates	122	8.73	2.12	-.56	241	.566
Aggression	Non Inmates	121	8.88	1.85			

According to the result in table 3 there is an insignificant difference indirect aggression between inmates and non inmates. It was observed that inmates scored ($M=8.73$; $SD=2.12$) while non inmates scored ($M=8.88$; $SD=1.85$).

Hypothesis 4: There will be significant sex differences on aggressive behaviour between inmates and non inmates.

Table 4: Independent t-test showing Sex Difference on Aggressive Behaviour

Variable	Sex	N	Mean	S.D	t	df	p
Aggression behaviour	Male	161	55.96	14.22	.76	241	.446
	Female	88	54.52	14.24			

It can be seen in table 5 that males differed significantly from their female counterparts on aggressive behaviour. Based on this finding, the research hypothesis was confirmed. The result further shows that male respondents had a mean and standard deviation scores significantly higher than females.

6. Discussion

Hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant difference in physical aggression between inmates and non inmates. The finding is in line with the work of Ireland, Archer and Power (2007) conducted a study that explores physical aggressive behaviour between inmates and non inmates and found a significant difference exist between inmates and non inmates on physical aggression. In a related development, DeLisi, et al. (2004) using the official infraction records of 831 male inmates sampled from the southwestern USA, their study explored difference in prison physical aggression (violence records) of inmates involved in street gangs, prison gangs and both types of gangs vis-à-vis chronic offenders and non inmates physical aggression and found significant difference between inmates and non inmates on physical aggressive behaviour.

The second hypothesis revealed significant difference between inmates and non inmates on verbal aggression. This finding agrees with the finding by Kreuz, Maj and Robert (2002). They found difference between inmates and non inmates on verbal aggression. In another finding which also agreed with the finding presented here is the work of Delisi, et al (2004) who explored difference between inmates and non inmates on verbal aggressive behaviour. Also, finding by Ramirez at el (2009) showed difference between inmates and non inmates on verbal aggressive behaviour.

The finding of this work further indicates that there is an insignificant difference between inmates and non inmates on indirect aggression. This study disagrees with the finding of the works of the Ireland, et al (2007) who conducted a study that explores indirect aggressive behaviour between inmates and non inmates and found a significant difference exist between inmates and non inmates on physical aggression.

The finding of this work also indicates that there is a significant difference between male and female respondents on aggressive behaviour. This finding is in line with the finding by Harer and Langan (2001) who investigate gender difference in predictors of prison aggression: assessing the predictive validity of a risk classification system. The finding shows that women commit less aggression and violence behaviour and less serious violence than men. Thus, signifying significant difference exist male and female on aggressive behaviour. In a related development, the work of Bjdrkqvist, et al (2009) who conducted a study to investigate whether adult males employ indirect aggression to the same extent as females.

7. Clinical Implications

In order for interventions to be most effective and to allocate scarce resources optimally, interventions for aggressive behaviour among inmates and non inmates should target those with higher levels of exposure to real life violence and hostile attribution bias and lower levels of empathy. Therefore, this work is of use to clinicians, in particular those involved in the justice system, and parents. For example, many young people, in particular those serving sentences in the community are not involved in education or vocational training and have limited engagement in pro-social activities. As a result, they have vast amounts of free time. Many of these adolescents spent this time engaging in the anti-social activities, such as misuse of drugs and, alcohol and delinquent acts, and playing videos games. Involvement in these activities may serve to increase the risk of the individual being aggressive. Thus, clinicians, prison officials and parents should attempt to engage inmates and non inmates who are without work in education or vocational training and increase the variety of leisure activities available to them (e.g., sports clubs, music and drama). Moreover, members of society and politician can also play a role in helping reduce the aggressive behaviour displayed by individuals; for example, by providing and engaging inmates and non-inmates in pro-social activities. It is hoped that by engaging young people in these alternative activities, in addition to reducing their exposure to violence activities and any, subsequent, negative effects of this exposure, their aggressive behaviour would be reduced.

8. Conclusion

The central objective of this study was to compare difference in aggressive behaviour between inmates and non inmates in Makurdi. A literature survey was conducted to form the theoretical premise for the study. The study examined differences in physical, verbal and indirect aggressive behaviour and also gender difference in aggressive behaviour was examined. The study contributes to the growing literature on aggressive behaviour. It provides the empirical evidence to support theoretical models that suggest difference in aggressive behaviour of inmates and non inmates.

9. Recommendation

Since this study has revealed that no significant differences exist between prison inmates and non-prison inmates in relation to physical, verbal, direct and indirect aggression, therefore, anger management which is one of the most common forms of rehabilitation program offered to prison inmates with high-risk behaviours could as well be offered to non prison-inmates in school, churches, motor parks, and the society at large. For this reason, it is important to determine whether anger management works in reducing anger and anger-related problem behaviours. Programs that would engage the inmates and non-inmate should be provided in order to reduce idleness that dominates inmates' lifestyle in prison on one hand and job opportunities should be created for unemployed youth who are already frustrated and manifesting aggressive behaviour in the society.

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